

New Revelation on Priesthood

Bruce R. McConkie, *Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (1989)

Personal Testimony of Revelation on Priesthood

I was present when the Lord revealed to President Spencer W. Kimball that the time had come, in His eternal providences, to offer the fulness of the gospel and the blessings of the holy priesthood to all men.

I was present, with my brethren of the Twelve and the counselors in the First Presidency, when all of us heard the same voice and received the same message from on high.

It was on a glorious June day in 1978. All of us were together in an upper room in the Salt Lake Temple. We were engaged in fervent prayer, pleading with the Lord to manifest his mind and will concerning those who are entitled to receive his holy priesthood. President Kimball himself was mouth, offering the desires of his heart and of our hearts to that God whose servants we are.

In his prayer President Kimball asked that all of us might be cleansed and made free from sin so that we might receive the Lord's word. He counseled freely and fully with the Lord, was given utterance by the power of the Spirit, and what he said was inspired from on high. It was one of those rare and seldom-experienced times when the disciples of the Lord are perfectly united, when every

heart beats as one, and when the same Spirit burns in every bosom.

Perfect Unity Among Presidency and Twelve

I have thought since that our united prayer must have been like that of the Nephite disciples—the Lord's Twelve in that day and for that people—who "were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting" to learn the name that the Lord had given to his Church (3 Ne. 27:1-3). In their day the Lord came personally to answer their petition; in our day he sent his Spirit to deliver the message.

And as it was with our Nephite brethren of old, so it was with us. We too had come together in the spirit of true worship and with unity of desire. We were all fasting and had just concluded a meeting of some three hours' duration that was attended by nearly' all of the General Authorities. That meeting was also held in the room of the First Presidency and the Twelve in the holy temple. In it we had been counseled by the First Presidency, had heard the messages and testimonies of about fifteen of the Brethren, had renewed our covenants, in the ordinance of sacrament, to serve God and keep his commandments that we might always have his Spirit to be with us, and, surrounding the holy altar, had offered up the desire of our hearts to the Lord. After this meeting, which was one of great spiritual uplift and enlightenment, all of the Brethren except those in the Presidency and the Twelve were excused.

President Kimball Directs

When we were alone by ourselves in that sacred place where we meet *weekly* to wait upon the Lord, to seek guidance from his Spirit, and to transact the affairs of his earthly kingdom, President Kimball brought up the matter of the possible conferral of the priesthood upon those of all races. This was a subject that the group of us had discussed at length on numerous occasions in the preceding weeks and months. The President restated the problem involved, reminded us of our prior discussions, and said he had spent many days alone in this upper room pleading with the Lord for an answer to our prayers. He said that if the answer was to continue our present course of denying the priesthood to the seed of Cain, as the Lord had theretofore directed, he was prepared to defend that decision to the death. But, he said, if the long-sought day had come in which the curse of the past was to be removed, he thought we might prevail upon the Lord so to indicate. He expressed the hope that we might receive a clear answer one way or the other so the matter might be laid to rest.

The Brethren Share Feelings

At this point President Kimball asked the Brethren if any of them desired to express their feelings and views as to the matter in hand. We all did so, freely and fluently and at considerable length, each person stating his views and manifesting the feelings of his heart. There was a marvelous outpouring of unity, oneness, and agreement in council. This session continued for somewhat more than two hours. Then President Kimball suggested that

we unite in formal prayer and said, modestly, that if it was agreeable with the rest of us he would act as voice.

Brethren Unite in Prayer

It was during that prayer that the revelation came. The Spirit of the Lord rested mightily upon us all; we felt something akin to what happened on the day of Pentecost and at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. From the midst of eternity, the voice of God, conveyed by the power of the Spirit, spoke to his prophet. The message was that the time had now come to offer the fulness of the everlasting gospel, including celestial marriage, and the priesthood, and the blessings of the temple, to all men, without reference to race or color, solely on the basis of personal worthiness. And we all heard the same voice, received the same message, and became personal witnesses that the word received was the mind and will and voice of the Lord.

President Kimball's prayer was answered and our prayers were answered. He heard the voice and we heard the same voice. All doubt and uncertainty fled. He knew the answer and we knew the answer. And we are all living witnesses of the truthfulness of the word so graciously sent from heaven.

Ancient Curse Removed

The ancient curse is no more. The seed of Cain and Ham and Canaan and Egyptus and Pharaoh (Abr. 1:20-27; Moses 5:16-41; 7:8, 22) —all these now have power to rise up and bless Abraham as their father. All these, Gentile in lineage, may now come and inherit by adoption all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Rom. 8:14-24; 9:4;

Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5; *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], pp. 149-50). All these may now be numbered with those in the one fold of the one shepherd who is Lord of all.

A Powerful Witness

In the days that followed the receipt of the new revelation, President Kimball and President Ezra Taft Benson—the senior and most spiritually experienced ones among us—both said, expressing the feelings of us all, that neither of them had ever experienced anything of such spiritual magnitude and power as was poured out upon the Presidency and the Twelve that day in the upper room in the house of the Lord. And of it I say: I was there; I heard the voice: and the Lord be praised that it has come to pass in our day.

"All Are Alike unto God"

Not long after this revelation came, I was scheduled to address nearly a thousand seminary and institute teachers on a Book of Mormon subject. After I arrived on the stand, Brother Joe J. Christensen, under whose direction the symposium was going forward, asked me to depart from my prepared talk and give those assembled some guidance relative to the new revelation. He asked if I would take 2 Nephi 26:33 as a text. This I agreed to do, and, accordingly, spoke the following words:

I would like to say something about the new revelation relative to our taking the priesthood to those of all nations and races. "He [meaning Christ, who is the Lord God] inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of

his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Ne. 26:33).

These words have now taken on a new meaning. We have caught a new vision of their true significance. This also applies to a great number of other passages in the revelations. Since the Lord gave this revelation on the priesthood, our understanding of many passages has expanded. Many of us never imagined or supposed that they had the extensive and broad meaning that they do have.

I shall give you a few impressions relative to what has happened, and then attempt—if properly guided by the Spirit—to indicate to you the great significance that this event has in the Church, in the world, and where the rolling forth of the great gospel is concerned.

Gospel Preached on a Priority Basis

The gospel goes to various peoples and nations on a priority basis. We were commanded in the early days of this dispensation to preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (see D&C 133:8, 16). Our revelations talk about its going to every creature (D&C 18:26-28; 58:64; 68:8; 80:1; 112:28-29; 124:128). There was, of course, no possible way for us to do all of this in the beginning days of our dispensation, nor can we now, in the full sense.

And so, guided by inspiration, we began to go from one nation and one culture to another. Someday, in the providences of the Lord, we shall get into Red China and

Russia and the Middle East, and so on, until eventually the gospel will have been preached everywhere, to all people; and this will occur before the second coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:14; JS-M 1:31).

Not only is the gospel to go, on a priority basis and harmonious to a divine timetable, to one nation after another, but the whole history of God's dealings with men on earth indicates that such has been the case in the past; it has been restricted and limited where many people are concerned. For instance, in the day between Moses and Christ, the gospel went to the house of Israel almost exclusively. By the time of Jesus, the legal administrators and prophetic associates that he had were so fully indoctrinated with the concept of having the gospel go only to the house of Israel that they were totally unable to envision the true significance of his proclamation that after the Resurrection they should then go to all the world. They did not go to the gentile nations initially. In his own ministration, Jesus preached only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and had so commanded the Apostles (Matt. 10:6).

It is true that he made a few minor exceptions because of the faith and devotion of some gentile people. There was one woman who wanted to eat the crumbs that fell from the table of the children, causing him to say, "O woman, great is thy faith." (Matt. 15:28; see also Mark 7:27-28; Matt. 9:10; Luke 7:9.) With some minor exceptions, the gospel in that day went exclusively to Israel. The Lord had to give Peter the vision and revelation of the sheet coming down from heaven with the unclean meat on it, following which Cornelius sent the messenger to Peter to learn what he, Cornelius, and his gentile associates

should do. The Lord commanded them that the gospel should go to the Gentiles, and so it was. (Acts 10:1-35.) There was about a quarter of a century, then, in New Testament times, when there were extreme difficulties among the Saints. They were weighing and evaluating, struggling with the problems of whether the gospel was to go only to the house of Israel or whether it now went to all men. Could all men come to him on an equal basis with the seed of Abraham?

There have been these problems, and the Lord has permitted them to arise. There is not any question about that. We do not envision the whole reason and purpose behind all of this; we can only suppose and reason that it is on the basis of preexistence and of our premortal devotion and faith.

You know this principle: God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him" (Acts 17:26-27)—meaning that there is an appointed time for successive nations and peoples and races and cultures to be offered the saving truths of the gospel. There are nations today to whom we have not gone—notably Red China and Russia. But you can rest assured that we will fulfill the requirement of taking the gospel to those nations before the second coming of the Son of Man.

Gospel to Cover Earth Before Second Coming

And I have no hesitancy whatever in saying that before the Lord comes, in all those nations we will have

congregations that are stable, secure, devoted, and sound. We will have stakes of Zion. We will have people who have progressed in spiritual things to the point where they have received all of the blessings of the house of the Lord. That is the destiny.

We have revelations that tell us that the gospel is to go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people before the second coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:14; JS-M 1:31). And we have revelations that recite that when the Lord comes, he will find those who speak every tongue and are members of every nation and kindred, who will be kings and priests, who will live and reign on earth with him a thousand years (Rev. 5:9-10; 1 Ne. 14:12; D&C 90:11). That means, as you know, that people from all nations will have the blessings of the house of the Lord before the Second Coming.

We Follow Living *Prophets*

We have read these passages and their associated passages for many years. We have seen what the words say and have said to ourselves, "Yes, it says that, but we must read out of it the taking of the gospel and the blessings of the temple to the Negro people, because they are denied certain things." There are statements in our literature by the early Brethren that we have interpreted to mean that the Negroes would not receive the priesthood in mortality. I have said the same things, and people write me letters and say, "You said such and such, and how is it now that we do such and such?" All I can say is that it is time disbelieving people repented and got in line and believed in a living, modern prophet. Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham

Young or President George Q. Cannon or whoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.

We get our truth and light line upon line and precept upon precept (2 Ne. 28:30; Isa. 28:9-10; D&C 98:11-12; 128:21). We have now added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past. They don't matter anymore. [1](#)

It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June 1978. It is a new day and a new arrangement, and the Lord has now given the revelation that sheds light out into the world on this subject. As to any slivers of light or any particles of darkness of the past, we forget about them. We now do what meridian Israel did when the Lord said the gospel should go to the Gentiles. We forget all the statements that limited the gospel to the house of Israel, and we start going to the Gentiles.

Time Had Come in the Lord's Timetable

Obviously, the Brethren had had a great anxiety and concern about this problem for a long period of time, and President Spencer W. Kimball had been exercised and had sought the Lord in faith. When we seek the Lord on a matter, with sufficient faith and devotion, he gives us an answer. You will recall that the Book of Mormon teaches that if the Apostles in Jerusalem had asked the Lord, he would have told them about the Nephites (3 Ne. 15:18-24;

16:4). But they did not ask, and they did not manifest the faith—and they did not get an answer. One underlying reason for what happened to us is that the Brethren asked in faith; they petitioned and desired and wanted an answer—President Kimball in particular. And the other underlying principle is that in the eternal providences of the Lord, the time had come for extending the gospel to a race and a culture to whom it had previously been denied, at least as far as all of its blessings are concerned. So it was a matter of faith and righteousness and seeking on the one hand, and it was a matter of the divine timetable on the other hand. The time had arrived when the gospel, with all its blessings and obligations, should go to the Negro.

President Kimball Offers Inspired Prayer

Thus, in that setting, on the first day of June 1978, the First Presidency and the Twelve, after full discussions of the proposition and all the premises and principles that are involved, importuned the Lord for a revelation.

President Kimball was mouth, and he prayed with great faith and great fervor; this was one of those occasions when an inspired prayer was offered. You know the Doctrine and Covenants' statement that if we pray by the power of the Spirit we will receive answers to our prayers and it will be given us what we shall ask (D&C 50:30). It was given the President what he should ask. He prayed by the power of the Spirit, and there was a perfect unity, total and complete harmony, between the Presidency and the Twelve on the issue involved.

Revelation Came—and Comes—by Holy Ghost

And when President Kimball finished his prayer, the Lord gave a revelation by the power of the Holy Ghost. Revelation primarily comes by the power of the Holy Ghost. Always that member of the Godhead is involved. But most revelations, from the beginning to now, have come in that way. There have been revelations given in various ways on other occasions. The Father and the Son appeared in the Sacred Grove. Moroni, an angel from heaven, came relative to the Book of Mormon and the plates and relative to instructing the Prophet in the affairs that were destined to occur in this dispensation. There have been visions, notably the vision of the degrees of glory. There may be an infinite number of ways that God can ordain that revelations come. But, primarily, revelation comes by the power of the Holy Ghost. The principle is set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 68:3-4), that whatever the elders of the Church speak, when moved upon by the power of the Holy Ghost, shall be scripture, shall be the mind and will and voice of the Lord.

Presidency and Twelve United Witnesses

on this occasion, because of the importuning and the faith, and because the hour and the time had arrived, the Lord in his providences poured out the Holy Ghost upon the First Presidency and the Twelve in a miraculous and marvelous manner, beyond anything that any then present had ever experienced. The revelation came to the President of the Church; it also came to each individual present. There were ten members of the Council of the Twelve and three of the First Presidency there assembled. The result was that President Kimball knew, and each one

of us knew, independent of any other person, by direct and personal revelation to us, that the time had now come to extend the gospel and all its blessings and all its obligations, including the priesthood and the blessings of the house of the Lord, to those of every nation, culture, and race, including the black race. There was no question whatsoever as to what happened or as to the word and message that came.

The revelation came to the President of the Church, and in harmony with Church government, was announced by him; the announcement was made eight days later over the signature of the First Presidency. But in this instance, in addition to the revelation coming to the man who would announce it to the Church and to the world, and who was sustained as the mouthpiece of God on earth, the revelation came to every member of the body that I have named. They all knew it in the temple.

Eternal Import of This Revelation

In my judgment this was done by the Lord in this way because it was a revelation of such tremendous significance and import; one that would reverse the whole direction of the Church, procedurally and administratively; one that would affect the living and the dead; one that would affect the total relationship that we have with the world; one, I say, of such significance that the Lord wanted witnesses who could bear record that the thing had happened.

Now, if President Kimball had received the revelation and had asked for a sustaining vote, obviously he would have received it and the revelation would have been

announced. But the Lord chose this other course, in my judgment, because of the tremendous import and the eternal significance of what was being revealed. This affects our missionary work and all of our preaching to the world. This affects our genealogical research and all of our temple ordinances. This affects what is going on in the spirit world, because the gospel is preached in the spirit world preparatory to men's receiving the vicarious ordinances that make them heirs to salvation and exaltation. This is a revelation of tremendous significance.

Revelation Affects Both Sides of the Veil

The vision of the degrees of glory begins by saying, "Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth" (D&C 76:1). In other words, in that revelation the Lord was announcing truth to heaven and to earth because those principles of salvation operate on both sides of the veil; and salvation is administered to an extent here to men, and it is administered to another extent in the spirit world. We correlate and combine our activities and do certain things for the salvation of men while we are in mortality, and then certain things are done for the salvation of men while they are in the spirit world awaiting the day of resurrection.

Saints Should Avoid Speculation and Exaggeration

Once again a revelation was given that affects this sphere of activity and the sphere that is to come. And so it has tremendous significance; the eternal import was such that it came in the way it did. The Lord could have sent messengers from the other side to deliver it, but he did

not. He gave the revelation by the power of the Holy Ghost. Latter-day Saints have a complex: many of them desire to magnify and build upon what has occurred, and they delight to think of miraculous things. And maybe some of them would like to believe that the Lord himself was there, or that the Prophet Joseph Smith came to deliver the revelation, which was one of the possibilities. Well, these things did not happen. The stories that go around to the contrary are not factual or realistic or true, and you as teachers in the Church Educational System will be in a position to explain and to tell your students that this thing came by the power of the Holy Ghost, and that all the Brethren involved, the thirteen who were present, are independent personal witnesses of the truth and divinity of what occurred.

Revelation Incomprehensible to Carnal Mind

There is no way to describe in language what is involved. This cannot be done. You are familiar with the Book of Mormon references where the account says that no tongue could tell and no pen could write what was involved in the experience and that it had to be felt by the power of the Spirit (3 Ne. 19:32; see also 3 Ne. 17:15-17). This was one of those occasions. To carnal people who do not understand the operating of the Holy Spirit of God upon the souls of man, this may sound like gibberish or jargon or uncertainty or ambiguity; but to those who are enlightened by the power of the Spirit and who have themselves felt its power, it will have a ring of veracity and truth, and they will know of its verity. I cannot describe in words what happened; I can only say that it happened and that it can be known and understood only by the feeling that can come into the heart of man. You

cannot describe a testimony to someone. No one can really know what a testimony is—the feeling and the joy and the rejoicing and the happiness that come into the heart of man when he gets one—except another person who has received a testimony. Some things can be known only by revelation. "The things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God" (Joseph Smith Translation 1 Cor. 2:11).

This Revelation a Sign of the Times

This is a brief explanation of what was involved in this new revelation. I think I can add that it is one of the signs of the times. It is something that had to occur before the Second Coming. It was something that was mandatory and imperative in order to enable us to fulfill all of the revelations that are involved, in order to spread the gospel in the way that the scriptures say it must spread before the Lord comes, in order for all of the blessings to come to all of the people, according to the promises. It is one of the signs of the times.

All the Brethren United in Testimony

This revelation that came on the first day of June 1978 was reaffirmed by the spirit of inspiration one week later on June 8, when the Brethren approved the document that was to be announced to the world. And then it was reaffirmed the next day, on Friday, June 9, with all of the General Authorities present in the temple, that is, all who were available. All received the assurance and witness and confirmation by the power of the Spirit that what had occurred was the mind, the will, the intent, and the purpose of the Lord.

God Guiding the Church

This is a wondrous thing; the veil is thin. The Lord is not far distant from his church.

President Kimball is a man of almost infinite spiritual capacity—a tremendous spiritual giant. The Lord has magnified him beyond any understanding or expression and has given him His mind and His will on a great number of vital matters that have altered the course of the past—one of which is the organization of the First Quorum of the Seventy. As you know, the Church is being guided and led by the power of the Holy Ghost, and the Lord's hand is in it. There is no question whatever about that. And we are doing the right thing where this matter is concerned.

Great Gratitude Because of This Revelation

There has been a tremendous feeling of gratitude and thanksgiving in the hearts of members of the Church everywhere, with isolated exceptions. There are individuals who are out of harmony on this and on plural marriage and on other doctrines, but for all general purposes there has been universal acceptance; and everyone who has been in tune with the Spirit has known that the Lord spoke, and that his mind and his purposes are being manifest in the course the Church is pursuing.

We talk about the scriptures being unfolded—read again the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16) and remind yourselves that those who labor through the heat of the day for twelve hours are going to be rewarded the same as those who came in at the third and sixth and eleventh hours. Well, it is the eleventh hour; it is the

Saturday night of time. In this eleventh hour the Lord has given the blessings of the gospel to the last group of laborers in the vineyard. And when he metes out his rewards, when he makes his payments, according to the accounts and the spiritual statements, he will give the penny to all, whether it is for one hour or twelve hours of work. All are alike unto God, black and white, bond and free, male and female.

(*Priesthood* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981], pp. 126-37.)

Notes

1 Illustrating the perfect harmony that exists between the doctrine and practice of the Church both here and in the spirit world, Elder McConkie said to a family gathering in Colorado Springs, on July 26, 1978, "This means that the same revelation had to be given to the Brethren in the Church in the spirit world, so that they can conform their preaching of the gospel to our new system on earth."

At that same gathering, to dramatize the significance of this revelation, he said, "This revelation is something in the same category as the revelation which caused Wilford Woodruff to issue the Manifesto."